

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR."

All THE YEAR ROUND

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LOUIS DRAYCOTT.

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CHAPTER IV. DUMPHIE IS AFFRONTED.

HAPPINESS is a great mystifier. We look upon things through an atmosphere that has a dazzle in it. We cannot see either plainly or clearly. Even retrospect plays tricks with us. As light radiates, so does our content spread itself out and blur the edges of time past and time present. Surely we have sailed upon this summer sea, both bright and calm, for many a day! It cannot be but yesterday that so fair a voyage was begun!

I dare say this sounds "high falutin" language to apply to such a locality as Prospect Place and such a middle-aged, prosaic person as Candace Birt, who has no deeper romance in her life than may be represented by an old kid glove. But the brightness that came into my life just at this time was very real—a beautiful, happy shining brightness, such as I had not known for many a year back. It made such a difference, Randall being married, and Lucille and the boys being really a part of us.

There, I have let the cat—or, rather, the four kittens—out of the bag.

It was the boys that so changed and brightened Prospect Place; more particularly Dumphie.

It came about that if a day passed without Dumphie's droll face appearing in our midst there seemed to be something wanting in that day. Even on one of her bad days, Sister Charlotte smiled when the boy drew near; and as to Kezia—well, the liberties the good woman let that boy take in the kitchen were beyond belief!

I have said very little of Stephen and John, the two "middle-men" of Lucille's quartette. But they are worthy of note. Both were solemn, round, self-possessed; they were always together, generally hand-in-hand, going partners in all games, and at night sleeping in the same little cot, like two plump birds cuddled up together in one nest.

Their passion was gardening, and they had a garden apiece at home, in which endless things were set; though nothing ever seemed to attain to any greater maturity than an odd green spike or two, or a stunted sprout here and there. The two used to come and "help Aunt Dacie" in that garden of which the pride was the poplar in its midst. I am not sure, by the way, that the roots of that majestic tree did not drain the soil of my small demesne of all its nourishment. Certainly other things grew with much apparent difficulty. Dumphie, after a critical examination, said the earth wanted "turning over." So Stephen and John, each armed with an old kitchen spoon, set to work to burrow like two little moles, and we hoped for the best results.

As to Glenarvon—otherwise Glennie—a special stool was told off to him, near Sister Charlotte's couch, on which he would sit enthroned like a small king, and Polly grew so fond of the child that she always greeted him as "My pretty dear!" and then made soft kissing noises with her big, black beak, climbing about in her cage and turning herself upside down in an ecstasy of welcome.

In fact, our house was pervaded by "the boys;" and the flood of young life brought brightness and change into our grey, middle-aged existences.

Not that Sister Charlotte and I are so

very old, after all. I have known many women of our years full of quite youthful buoyancy and brightness. But age is relative, and we have led those colourless lives that soon grow rusty.

"It's almost as good as having a family of one's own," I said to Kezia, as I looked up through the kitchen window at John and Stephen, insisting on both carrying the same watering-pot, and upsetting a good deal of the contents in consequence.

"Better, mum," said Kezia, rolling steadily at the paste for to-morrow's pie—"better a deal, for when you're tired of 'em, you can send 'em packing."

A sort of shame used to come over me sometimes, when I remembered how I had looked upon the boys as mere incumbrances. I understood, now, Lucille's devotion to them, and could enter into and admire the way they had of all gathering round her, like chicks about a hen, whenever she appeared upon the scene.

And this brings me to speak of another source of happiness in my changed life: the perfect content of my dear brother in his marriage. It was a beautiful thing to see then; it is a tender, pitiful memory now. I never saw anything quite so complete as their sympathy for and with each other. It was true, indeed, that saying of Randall's, in a day that now seemed long ago: "There has never been anything so good in my life before."

The change this happiness wrought in him was marvellous. He grew to look years younger; all trace of ill-health left him. He had the eyes of a boy, the step of a man young in heart and feeling.

"I wish the mother could bo' see him," Kezia would say, passing her apron across her eyes; "he's just bonnie. And I'm no' saying anything agen the 'cumbrances; they're better nor might be, considerable. And Master Glennie, he's a loikely child. And, 'Kezia,' says he, 'my feets do be so muddy; lif' me over to the mat.' So I lif' him, and he puts up his bit face and kisses me when I set him down. There's worse childer goin' than them, Miss Dacie, and that's all about it."

Dumphie patronised Prospect Place and all it contained. He backed to look up at the poplar, and said, yes, it was a good tree in its way, as if he rather thought it might be tempted one of these days to try to pass itself off as a cedar, or an oak; and it was just as well not to cocker it up too much.

He would stand warming his hands at

the fire, and looking gravely from me to Charlotte, and from Charlotte back to me, and finally break into speech, thus:

"I like you two. I'm glad I know you. It's nice to know you, and to come here when I like."

Sister Charlotte would get very red at this, and stare out of window, and cough behind her hand to give herself a countenance. But the grave, owl-like face of the child, watching us both with solemn innocence, obliged us to receive his gracious approval in the spirit in which it was given.

It will be remembered that on our first acquaintance the—well, let us call it absence of beauty on the part of Dumphie, had struck me forcibly. Now, I caught myself feeling hotly indignant, because some casual acquaintance ventured to hint that my brother's stepson was a plain child.

So do times change, and we with the times; and so the dearest of to-day may be the man or woman for whom, not very far back in the past, we entertained feelings of aversion and dislike.

The poplar having shaken its head free from the very last lingering leaf, had stood a bare, brown sentinel through the winter; once again the golden scrolls of a myriad buds had crept about its sides where little branches clustered thickly; once again the leaves, thick and verdant, whispered in the summer breezes, rustling over my head as I tended my lagging roses, and the blue-eyed Nemophila, in which the cats would make beds and roll themselves thereon impudently before my eyes. And now—the summer was past, the autumn at hand with its ruddy tints and beautiful decay.

Randall and Lucille had been married a year; a year that, as I looked back upon it, seemed so full of life and movement as to be like ten!

Swing, swing went the bushy head of our poplar-tree to this side and to that; down swirled the leaves, scattering here and there, scurrying off pursued by the wind, while my principal enemy, the black cat next door, chased an odd one or two, patting them gently with her paw as she brought them to a standstill.

I had on my big garden gloves, and my gardening hat; a prodigious headgear of the mushroom shape. Combined with a gardening hoe by way of sceptre, I found this costume marvellously well calculated to strike terror into bad and evil boys, who would clamber to the top of the garden wall, cast longing glances at my few poor

flowers, and at one stern glance from under the pent-house of my hat, and one up-raising of the hoe, would drop into the lane outside, as if, to quote Kezia, "They had seen a boggart."

In this fascinating gear, then, I was hopefully planting a few late asters, bought in a confiding spirit from a man at the door, when Dumphie, very red in the face, and evidently in a high state of indignation, marched out of the house and took up his stand right in front of me.

"Aunt Dacie," he said, panting a little as he spoke; "is there going to be anything the matter with my nose?"

Beyond being the most decided snub, I knew of no imperfection in Dumphie's nose; so I smiled and said:

"What do you mean, you silly child?"

"I mean that Kezia is a very rude woman; I mean that I am very angry, and that John, and Stevie, and Glen, will be very angry too. Kezia said that my nose was going to be put out of joint, and she felt it. Aunt Dacie—she felt it—with her rough hand."

I bent over the late asters. I did not look at Dumphie for a moment or two. Then I said:

"You must forgive Kezia this time, dear."

But Dumphie looked mutinous; and glared down through the kitchen-window, where he beheld Kezia, biting a corner of her apron to keep the laughter that was in her from bubbling over.

My garden operations finished—during which Dumphie was broodingly silent, and of impressive dignity as to demeanour—the boy and I passed into the house together; and, as luck would have it, encountered Kezia.

Dumphie stood stock still, barring her passage.

"You are a rude woman. You were very rude to—my nose," said he, "and I am very angry. Kezia, next time I come to see Aunt Dacie, I shall not come into the kitchen at all."

Doubtless Dumphie expected to hear Kezia cry, like the first murderer of old, that her punishment was greater than she could bear; but Kezia remained calm and smiling, possibly reflecting within herself that the smell of newly-baked cakes would quickly lure the quarry.

Dumphie's errand had been to tell me that Lucille would like to see me that afternoon. Lucille was not strong just now, and could not walk far at a time;

for a prospect was near at hand that put Sister Charlotte and myself quite in a flutter to think of; and really any one might have thought we had entered into second childhood, and taken to dolls again, had they judged by the quaint bits of garments that occasionally lurked in our work-baskets, hiding their improprieties under quilted silk covers, and worked at stealthily when quite safe from possible callers of the sterner sex.

Not but what Mr. Candytuft once got the better of us, calling at an absurdly early hour, and being shown into the back parlour, where I found him with a diminutive shirt stuck on his two fat thumbs by its tiny cambric sleeves.

"Blessed is the man that hath his quiver full of them," said, or rather bellowed, the reverend gentleman, as I entered; leaving it apparently an open question whether a multiplicity of shirts, or creatures to wear them, was the fact which conferred a blessing.

My confusion was extreme; but I called to mind the existence of no fewer than ten little Candytufts at home, and the consequent probability that Mr. Candytuft had seen several baby's shirts in the passing of the years.

Indeed, as I said to Sister Charlotte afterwards, it might have been worse. It might have been the curate, the very shyest creature, who blushed purple when Glennie said their cat at home had got three "dear little tittens." If kittens upset a man, what would anything suggestive of a baby do?

But I am quite forgetting Dumphie and his troubles, which was more than he did; for, as he and I walked over to the pleasant square near at hand, where Randall and Lucille had made their home, Dumphie every now and then took fits of deep thought, uneasily fingering the place where the bridge of his nose ought to have been—and wasn't.

I, too, looked askance at him now and then, wondering how he would take to a baby sister.

Of course there was no reason in the world why I should settle in this autocratic way that Lucille's baby would be a little girl, with the mother's soft, bright eyes, and a ruffled, curly head, like that picture of Randall when he was a boy, that mother used to count one of her most precious earthly treasures—no reason at all.

And yet I declare I saw the little

creature in my mind's eye so often, that she had become quite a familiar figure in my daily life. Indeed, if she had been a boy—dear, dear, I am getting sadly mixed in my genders—I should have felt nothing short of defrauded. Well, when this little maid should come, how would the fact of her existence be taken by the boys; in other words, by—Dumphie?

If Dumphie appropriated and patronised her, then the others would follow suit. Stephen and John would sit by her side, like two fat pigeons on a rail, and look at her complacently; and Glennie would say she was quite "perzackly."

We never quite knew, any of us, what Glennie meant by this mysterious word; but to him it was evidently a sound pregnant with meaning. If Glennie said you were "perzackly," then might you rejoice; if Glennie said of anything, it "doesn't be 'perzackly,'" and "Glennie doesn't love it," then was that thing anathema maranatha.

I was fain to hope, then, that Dumphie would approve of my infant niece, and Glennie would announce to a listening world that he considered the baby "quite 'perzackly.'

That afternoon, when the boys were gone away to play at being bears in a wood upstairs, and Lucille and I were left alone in the pretty, cosy room she called her own, I was struck with the fragility of her appearance; the wan pallor of the face, lit up by the large, bright, pensive eyes; the colourlessness of the lips that trembled even as they smiled.

"Is anything the matter? Are you feeling worse than usual? Is that what you sent for me for?" I said, hurriedly.

"No, no," she answered, plucking playfully at my dress, and shaking her pretty head from side to side. "I only wanted to say a few words to you, Dacie, dear, to you who have been so good, so very good to me. I hardly know why I wanted to hear you say—what I know there is no need to say—because it goes without the saying."

I sat down with a jerk. I could not help it. My knees seemed to give way under me. I untied my bonnet-strings, also with a jerk, and flung them back.

"Lucille," I said, panting, "you are going to say something dreadful. I know you are!"

At this, she caught and held me.

"Nay, dear; nothing dreadful. Foolish, if you will. Since, as I said before, it is only a fond fancy of mine to hear you say—"

"Do not," I cried, putting my hands to her shoulders and pushing her back from me; "do not speak the thing that is in your heart. Lucille! Lucille! I cannot bear it. You know what he said, 'There had never been anything so good in his life before; never anything so good.'"

Slowly the tears gathered in the great, soft eyes—slowly fell—yet a smile was on the pale, sweet lips.

"I know," she said. "I know that it has been very good; but yet, dear Dacie, dear sister, God does not give us happiness as an out-and-out gift; it is always His to take back when He wills; often it is but lent us for a while. I have had so little of it in my life that this one year has been—"

Her voice faltered, then broke to a sob; while, as for me, I was a perfect wreck. Glennie could not possibly have described Aunt Dacie as "quite perzackly," had he seen her with bonnet tilted all awry, and a face puckered up to keep the tears back; indeed, a glimpse of myself presently caught in the mirror, showed me nothing less than the ruins of a middle-aged lady slightly intoxicated as to headgear.

I was in great terror that Randall should come in and accuse me of agitating Lucille. I did not want Lucille to be agitated. I did not want to listen to what she had to say. I wished most ardently that the boys had never gone upstairs to play at bears in a wood.

But Lucille held me fast, and said her say. She heard me utter words for the sound of which she had longed. She heard me promise that if—that if—what is the good of putting it down in black and white? Those who have ever looked at a woman they dearly love, knowing that her hour of trial draws near, can fill it up for themselves, and fancy just what I felt as I promised my brother's wife to stand by the boys—and the baby, if need be—"for ever and ever, Amen," as Dumphie was wont to say when he wanted to express an indefinite period of time.

When I got home after this trying interview, I went straight to my room without seeing Sister Charlotte.

She was so very astute, was Sister Charlotte! As Kezia put it, "It weren't no manner of use getting up ever so early in the morning to be even wi' Miss Charlotte; you need to stop up all night." Those bright dark eyes of hers saw through everything. The languor of her weak and suffering body never touched them. Still,

on this occasion, I carried myself with subtlety. I bathed my red eyes with tepid water; I sat with my back to the light when I went down to the parlour. But my strategy was of no avail.

"Have you a cold in your head, Sister Dacie?" said the invalid, raising her eyes from her knitting, and giving me the benefit of their penetrating gaze.

"No—dear me! No," I answered, briskly, with the air of one who should say that such a thing as a cold in the head was an evil well-nigh unknown.

"Then you have been crying?"

Lying—even white lying—never comes easily to me. I should often get on better with—that is, I should often be able to adapt myself better to Sister Charlotte if it did.

So I answered by a snuffle, and lost sight of the bead I was supposed to be threading.

"What have you been crying for?"

When Sister Charlotte speaks in that tone I dare no more refuse to answer her than a shivering heretic, in the wicked old days when Christian persecution flourished, dared refuse to answer the Grand Inquisitor.

"I have been thinking something might happen to—Lucille."

"Sister Dacie, you are a fool."

I did not dispute this assertion. I hadn't it in me to dispute anything. I sat and blinked at the fire, and pretended not to see that Kezia sniffed curiously as she brought the tea in. I was haunted by Lucille's looks, by Lucille's words.

"Her eyes looked like the eyes of a spirit," I thought, as I lifted the tea-pot lid and put in the regulation three spoonfuls—one for Sister Charlotte, one for myself, and one for the pot. How her voice shook, and what a smile came across her face—a smile that touched her eyes as well as her lips, as she said: "Married a year to-day!"

"Sister Dacie, you are putting the milk into the slop-basin!" cried a voice from the sofa; and Kezia, bringing in one solitary muffin, sniffed again, as who should say: "I may be in the dark now as to what's up with you, Miss Dacie, but I'll find out all about it in a bit, see if I don't."

Which of course she did; and she and I sat up talking it all over long after Sister Charlotte was safely asleep, with the rush-light burning in the basin.

And outside, the night grew dark and gusty, and the poplar-tree, swaying its head from side to side, shook off thick,

pattering showers of rain-drops against the window-panes, while the wind whistled and moaned, and raised the carpet underneath our feet like the waves of a mimic sea.

"Married a year to-day," I said, musingly; "and what a happy time it has been!"

"Ay," answered Kezia, "she's a brightsome cratur is Mrs. Randall; and it passes me, Miss Dacie, to think how this blessed house can ha' heit its head up among its neighbours wi'out them daft laddies comin' round about, and pokin' their blessed fingers into every pot and pan i' my kitchen, and teasin' old Poll, and fallin' up the stairs and down the steps, and all such-like doin's; to say nothin' of cheerin' up Miss Charlotte ever so, and puttin' some loife and sperrit into a crusty old curmudgeon like me. We're twice the folk, Miss Dacie, sin' we had them will-o'-the-bogs about the place, and shame be mine that I ca'd 'em so when first Master Randall went a-courtin'. They be downright blessin's in disguise, and naught else, them lads be. They've took ten year off you and Miss Charlotte, and that's all about it. An' ain't Master Dumpy the bragian sarpint of a boy neither for cheekiness? and don't he carry on loike as if he wur a born prince, and no less? Lord ha' mussy on us all this night! What be that?"

It was a sharp, ringing crash downstairs that disturbed the current of Kezia's chatter; and in a moment she and I were rushing downstairs, full of threats against some godless youth who had, doubtless, hurled a stone at the front parlour window.

No such midnight crime had, however, been perpetrated.

The noise which had startled us owned quite another origin; for there, flat on its face, lay the large portrait of my brother Randall, which now hung opposite Sister Charlotte's couch, and had hung in mother's bedroom, just above the little table where lay her Bible and the box that held all her "boy's" letters in the olden days.

The cord yet swung gently to and fro against the wall, vibrating from the sudden severance; for both rings had given way, and were snapped asunder.

I raised the picture tenderly; a sense of dread and of desecration coming over me as through the shivered glass my brother's boyish face—smiling, happy, débonnaire, as it had never been since that day when he kissed mother for the last time—looked at me.

"I'd best brush the splinters up—happen they'll get i' somebody's feet, else," said Kezia, and was at work with her dustpan and brush in double quick time. She seemed glad of an excuse not to meet my eyes; and I saw that she shook her head ominously, from time to time. Then, without word or comment, we went upstairs to bed; where for long I lay awake, listening to the song of the wind in the poplar-tree, and the patter of the rain upon the panes.

AN ARTIST'S SKETCHES IN CANADA.

II. MONTREAL AND QUEBEC.

OTTAWA may be the Capital of Canada, but Montreal is the Metropolis. Directly one steps out of the poor, mean station—shortly to be replaced by a magnificent edifice near the Windsor Hotel—this fact impresses itself upon the senses. Notre Dame Street, that with which the traveller makes first acquaintance, is neither imposing nor lovely, but it is full of active, energetic life; and as we proceed further into the city, evidences of prosperity and importance multiply.

At the same time, the "lions" of Montreal may easily be seen in a day; not because they are few or insignificant, but because they lie within a small circle.

We were told that we must hire a "hackman" to take us about, and, therefore, formed ideas of vast spaces to be traversed; but it would seem that Canadians, like Americans, do not care to walk when they can drive, and our knowledge of this idiosyncrasy, combined with the facts that the thermometer was below zero, and the streets ice-bound, determined us to walk, and take the consequences.

From an artistic point of view, there is nothing very special to run after in Montreal itself, and so, after having duly inspected the really fine public buildings—the Post Office, Merchant's Exchange, McGill College, amongst others; having done our duty to the churches—to Notre Dame, gaudy, but imposing, and built apparently on a slope; to the Church of the Gesu, vast and uninteresting; and to the New Catholic Cathedral, still in a state of infancy, so far as the interior is concerned, and looking none the more attractive with the wreck of a fancy-fair strewn about it—we started up the steep, slippery streets to Mont Royal.

A road winds round and round the hill to the summit; but we preferred the pilgrims' stairs, and were amply repaid for half an hour's rather toilsome struggle over ice and snow.

From between the stems of the pines a peerless panorama is seen of Montreal—its highly cultivated surroundings, the magnificent rivers, Ottawa and St. Lawrence, which here join—the latter crossed by the famous Victoria Bridge—and the vast world of forest stretching away as far as the eye can reach. The extreme beauty of the winter scene was heightened by a brilliant sunset, and our enjoyment of it was intensified by the fact that we were the solitary occupants of this lone plateau of tree-dotted snow, and, although but eight hundred feet above the busy city, in a world of absolute silence.

Montreal has the name of being one of the liveliest places on the American Continent. Society here, although, of course, largely bound up with commerce, does not allow the vision of the almighty dollar to obstruct its eye for enjoyment, and, during the winter months especially, frisks and gambols with an enthusiasm which would be deemed out of place in the neighbouring United States—skating, tobogganing, making long snow-shoe expeditions on moonlight nights, sleighing, dancing, and feasting. Already we saw in the shop-windows the prize design for the Ice Palace, to be built for the Carnival of 1889, and were told that if we had never seen the Montreal Ice Carnival, we did not know what fun and amusement meant.

But we imagine it would be impossible at any time to be dull and depressed in Montreal. There is a light and cheerfulness about sights and sounds, a buoyant freshness in the air of the wide streets and the numerous open spaces, which assert themselves potently, and which induce one to look at life with a cheerful eye. So it was with regret that we yielded to the demands of our limited time, and set our faces Quebecwards.

The six hours' journey between the two places transports us almost magically into quite a different world.

We jump from to-day into a distant past; we exchange the society of quick-moving, brisk-speaking, alert-looking contemporaries for a stage of shadows. Prose and reality give way to romance and history. Canada, young, lusty, and strong, is pushed aside for old France; for Quebec, although the Union Jack has

floated from her Citadel for one hundred and fifty years, is a piece of old France set in a framework of New World scenery; and, as Bayard Taylor says, although but seventy or eighty years older than New England, seems to be separated from it by a space of five hundred years.

Quebec is dead. There is nothing to be gained by softening down the truth. Her commerce is going to Montreal; her population, if not actually diminishing, is standing still. Yet there is a charm about Quebec possessed by no other city in America—a double charm, made up of exquisite natural beauty and the pathetic shadow of a stirring past.

The thermometer marked ten degrees below zero as we glided on our sleigh up snow-bound hills from the station to the "Saint Louis," Quebec's solitary hotel. We involuntarily spoke in whispers as we passed along the quiet streets, with their lines of quaint, old houses; the gaunt, dark walls of which stood out in striking contrast to the moonlit snow on their roofs, and simultaneously recalled a moonlight mid-winter passage, of long years before, along the quiet waterways of Venice.

The next morning, early, we were out on the esplanade below the Citadel. Before us—far below us—shone the beautiful river, out of which the last Allan liner of the season was slowly making her way to England. On the opposite shore, beyond the island of Orleans, which here breaks the course of the river, nestles Point Levi amidst her almost home-like scenery of park, field, and orchard. High up on our right rose the Citadel, with the "meteor flag" flapping against the staff as if shuddering with the intense cold. Behind us, in a small enclosure, was the monument which commemorates the two heroes, whose names naturally spring to the lips whenever Quebec is mentioned—the Frenchman, Montcalm, from old-world Nismes; the Englishman, Wolfe, from quiet Kentish Westerham—and inscribed: "Mortem virtus communem, famam historia, monumentum posteritas dedit."

Hard by the garden stands the huge timbered house which was formerly the residence of the French Governors of Quebec, whilst to our left rises the spire of one of the earliest French churches, and the majestic buildings of the Laval University. All around them is a confused jumble of old houses, with white casemented windows, carved doorways, and high roofs, descending by streets so steep that they are being

utilised by the youth of Quebec as tobogganing slides away down to the water's edge.

We make our way to the Citadel, along an old street, in which so unobtrusively does the present assert itself in the domain of the past, that, with but a slight effort of the imagination, we can people it with the shadows of a long-buried life: Montcalm, issuing from his head-quarters, in that lowly cottage opposite our hotel, now occupied by a gentleman who styles himself a "capillary and tonsorial artist;" sedan-chairs, with bewigged and furbeloved gallants and dames on their way to a stately reception at the Governor's house, or to some fashionable salon wherein, we may be sure, will be reproduced, on a small scale, the pomp and glitter of the Faubourg Saint Germain far away—for Quebec, under the French rule, was no mere rough settlement of soldiers and fur-traders, but a social centre of high-born French adventurers, who carried old France with them wherever they went—and white-gaitered grenadiers tumbling out of the now decrepit barrack buildings to answer the alarm bugle on the citadel.

As we mount the steep snow slope to the fortress entrance, we almost expect to be hailed with a "Qui va là?" but our guide is a smart sergeant of the Canadian Artillery, which now garrison the place instead of the Queen's troops, and a very intelligent guide he turns out to be. We pass through a "curtain" of the fortifications, which strangely reminds us of a corner in the old feudal citadel of Yedo, in Japan, and are in the barrack-square, where a squad of Artillerymen are performing manœuvres to the notes of a brisk bugle band. We note the solitary piece of cannon captured at Bunker's Hill; proceed to the saluting battery, whence a glorious view of Quebec and the country round is gained; and our inspection of the Citadel is completed.

The afternoon we devote to the pet lion of Quebec—the drive to the famous Falis of Montmorenci. So completely wrapped up in furs as to be hardly recognisable as human beings, we rattle away in our sleigh up the broad road which leads out of the city; by the gate, restored upon the old lines under the auspices of the Princess Louise; past the huge drill shed; and, turning sharply to the left, are soon on historic ground. These are the heights of Abraham, and here it was on the fourteenth of September, 1759, that Montcalm was driven from the strong position he had fortified to give

battle to Wolfe and his Englishmen, who had scaled the heights, quietly and unseen, under cover of the darkness of the preceding night. A plain column, surmounted by a military trophy, and bearing the simple inscription : "Here died Wolfe, victorious," commemorates one of the most familiar incidents of British history ; but in the quiet, snow-wrapped scene around there is nothing else to remind us of the terrible fighting of that fateful day, which gave Canada to Great Britain.

Our sleigh rattles away again. We pass through the very heart of the French suburban quarter of the city, with French sights and sounds on every side ; cross the ice-bound Saint Charles River ; and are in the open country. For eight miles we speed along in the keen but exhilarating air, which seems to defy all attempts on the part of fur cap, fur collar, and woollen gloves to keep it out ; our bells ringing gaily ; and our vehicle running as smoothly over the hard snow as on ice. Through hamlet after hamlet we dash ; each one a picture of old French life in itself, with French "auberges," French shop-signs, and French figures dotted about everywhere.

Finally, we pull up at the village of Montmorenci—the scene of the battle fought by Wolfe immediately before the capture of Quebec—and, after paying a small fee for the privilege of crossing private grounds, make the best of our way along a faint path cut in the deep snow to the Falls.

We saw Montmorenci Falls under what we considered to be peculiarly fitting circumstances. The winter day was just waning into evening, and in the strange, grey, uncertain light there was something almost weird and ghostly in the appearance of this white-robed, gently falling river, with the soft French name, with the dark woods clustering down to its very edge, and the dark sky above, yet faintly tinged with the last red streaks of a glowing sunset. There is no turmoil, and roar of mighty pent-up strength here. The waters seem to sink quietly over the two hundred and fifty feet of sheer precipice into the abyss below, and the effect on the spectator is soothing and pleasing rather than awe-inspiring. But they only seem to sink quietly ; for that rising sheet of spray, and those great snow billows, on either side, speak of mighty force which, but for the chain of hard frost which binds Nature, would change the scene to one of

terrible grandeur. These billows of snow, which clothe the rocks on either side of the Fall, are a striking feature in the scene, for they are literally water frozen in the act of falling, so that the cascade, seen as we saw it in mid-winter, is but a tithe of its volume in summer time.

Some idea of the intensity of the cold in these regions may be gleaned from the fact, that, during the months of January and February, the spray of the Fall is frozen into a solid mass of ice, which so slopes that the Quebec people come out in hundreds to use it as a tobogganing slide, starting from the summit and speeding far away down on to the river Saint Lawrence below.

We came to see Canada under its winter aspect. At Montmorenci, on this quiet, cold evening, we for the first time approximately realised what the awful solitude of Nature must have been in these north-west regions ere man arrived to establish his empire amongst them.

Save the towers—which had once supported a bridge over the Falls, and which fell, carrying with it a luckless peasant and his family—a hut or two, and the stair-way leading to the foot of the Falls, there was absolutely nothing here to remind one of the existence of man. The dark masses of pine and juniper ; the white outline of the cascade ; the deep, white snow on all sides ; and the magnificent panorama through which the broad river wound on its way to Quebec—all were wrapped in utter silence. The scene impressed us far more vividly than if we had viewed it under the influence of summer sunshine ; and we no longer wondered that the poor Indian mind of old days could only see in such works of Nature the semblance of a dread Spirit.

The evening drive back to Quebec through the villages, now active and animated with the return of the toilers from the city lumber-yards ; with groups of children coming out of school, chattering in voluble French ; and with the arrival of old-world mail-coach sleighs ; was very pleasant, and we turned into our hotel thoroughly well pleased with our day in Quebec.

We found the hall of the hotel full of men, and learned that the Canadian hotel hall is regarded as a sort of club or rendezvous for the lovers of gossip and news : any one who chooses walking in and out, greeting his acquaintances, smoking his cigar and patronising the

liquor-bar without let or hindrance. We were the only tourists about, the company being made up of local residents, commercial travellers, and the members of a Boston troupe of strolling players, who were vehemently discussing the behaviour of a certain section of the Quebec jeunesse dorée which had behaved uproariously during the performance of the previous evening.

In only one thing were we disappointed during our stay in Quebec, and this was our inability to see the "noble savage." At Lake Saint John, a day's journey from Quebec in a north-westerly direction, he may be seen in something nearly approaching his original condition, especially about Chicoutimi and Ha Ha Bay; but we were told that during the winter months whole families are away, engaged in fur-getting and sealing operations, and that probably we should only be rewarded for our long journey by the sight of a few squaws and "papoosea." Moreover, the railway has invaded their territory, and is working its usual changes amongst them, slowly but surely; whilst the annually increasing number of sportsmen and tourists who flock to the neighbourhood of the Saguenay River, will soon lead to the establishment of hotels and accessories of civilisation in the very midst of Indian territory. Indeed, although the Huron Indians of Lake Saint John still live in wigwams, and cling to the feather and bead costume of romance, as well as to the old ceremonies and customs—especially those attending the induction of a "brave"—we were assured that every season sees some modification on their part of old ideas in favour of the new order of things, so that before many years are past they will resemble their brethren at Oka on the Ottawa River, who, although proud of the old poetic names of Iroquois and Algonquin, are not above wearing the hats and breeches of prosaic Eastern civilisation, nor of living in houses; and who are as keen in their curio transactions as the more practised purveyors of the Old World.

The old Quebec of the French quarter is very attractive to the artist, and at every turn of the ever-turning streets he will find a "bit" for his pencil, whether a type from the people themselves, or a street corner, or a group of old houses. "Break-neck Stairs" is a characteristic specimen, so are the collections of buildings on the quay-side; and as no new broom has ever swept with permanent results through

the old city, it is not likely now that in its decadence it will materially alter.

One strange effect of climate on the people we noticed, and this was, that with his French language, his French habits of life, and his French associations, the Quebec man is rather a silent and reserved individual—not at all addicted to the frivolity and chatter typical of his race, but seeming to preserve in his own marked idiosyncrasies some trace of the care and anxiety which must have hardened and sobered his hardy forefathers, the first pioneers to this wild region. He is loyal to the backbone, and is a determined opponent to the scheme now much talked of in the circles of agitators and malcontents, of annexation to the United States. Another curious characteristic is his contempt for the France and the French of to-day, his emphatic lament over the degeneracy of his race over the Atlantic, and his sturdy conservatism in the matter of old feudal institutions, his reverence for noble blood and the preservation of the old French language.

We could profitably have spent a much longer time in and about Quebec, but the Almanac was inexorable; and so, with great regret we left the fair old city, and its picturesque, Old World life, and were soon again in the very vortex of the dollar-hunting world of the States.

AUTHORSHIP: PAST AND PRESENT.

IN his terrible book on "The Calamities of Authors," Disraeli the elder has this curious sentence: "Of all the sorrows in which the female character may participate, there are few more affecting than that of an authoress."

These words strike the key-note of the entire book. It is one of the most doleful jeremiads ever penned. Would that we could say that it is also one of the most unjustifiable. There is certainly reason enough in it; though there is less than there seems to be. And yet it is much less applicable to our age than to any previous age.

Do but think how, with the spread of elementary education, and the growth of the press, the field for writers has been enlarged since Isaac Disraeli's time. Then there is the vast increase of population, at home and abroad, all crying out for food spiritual. And, notwithstanding intermittent periods of bad trade, and hard times,

there has been steady addition to the balances in the banks, upon which the purchase of luxuries, whether books or diamond bracelets, mainly depends.

The author's chances have necessarily multiplied in like manner. He need no longer take up his burden with the assurance, on all sides of him, and from his monitor within, that he has saddled himself with an incubus that must either slay him prematurely after grievous sufferings, or curse his length of days, so that he shall again and again sigh for the peace and rest of the tomb. It may even be doubted if the number of aspirants for literary bread, or champagne (as the case may prove), has increased much in excess of their opportunities. And indubitably one must now be either a monstrous dull pedant, or a singular trifler, to suffer the fate of the brilliant, luckless "Orator Henley," who left at his death six thousand manuscripts, all unpublished, valued at a guinea apiece by the writer, as a reproach to a world that treated him but scurvily. Alas, for the poor man's skill as an appraiser of literary wares! The six thousand manuscripts were sold posthumously for less than a hundred pounds; and, to the bargain of the manuscripts, one hundred and fifty volumes of memoranda were added!

Our age is, above all things, a sensible one. Of old, we were ignorant enough to be rash—in wars, dynastic affairs, personal interests, and callings. But the nation would, nowadays, reason away the need for such a campaign as Pitt counselled us into; and would weigh well a King's head against a Puritan Commonwealth before sacrificing the one to the other. And it is the same with individuals. Whereas, for example, our forefathers married when nature suggested the idea to them, and never bruted the fancy that men and women might live apart from each other; we coldly hold our destined brides aloof, or view them under the microscope until convinced that they have many more defects than are apparent to the naked eye, and that these failings are not conducive to our comfort; or we suddenly realise that marriage is a failure, and that we are under no imperative responsibility to provide sons for our estates and our country.

In our choice of a calling, we are likewise very judicious and discreet. The odds are that we are also a little obstinate; but it is an obstinacy the outcome of our discretion rather than of unenlightened prejudice. If, for example, our sire—good

honest man, a score and a half of years behind the times—sets us in a groove for one profession, ten to one we soon inform him that it is just the profession of all others for which we are unfitted. Nor is it anything to the point that, had he placed us in a different groove, this despised profession would then have attracted us irresistibly.

It is to this lack of perception in the parent that so many votaries of literature may trace their liaison with a profession, which they cannot lightly decline after a few hard and bitter years of apprenticeship. The wise father should take his bright and hopeful son by the arm ere his inclinations have stiffened in one direction; should guide his steps towards the radiant Mount of Parnassus; discuss with him the substantial glory that attends upon literary fame; point to the immortal quartos and duodecimos upon his bookshelves; and ply him yearningly with the "tu quoque" suggestion—should, in fine, offer him a meagre but adequate allowance for a term of years, during which he should pledge himself to do naught but seek reputation and pelf at the hands of the publishers. The stripling will not hesitate, in such a case, to turn his back upon Parnassus. And the gladsome sire may, by-and-by, thank his wit that the boy has grown into a portly broker, with balances at two or three different banks; or into an eloquent Q.C., whose working minutes are worth a sovereign apiece.

But I am going astray in my argument. I would fain assert the reasonableness of the literary profession in these happy days, and not the imprudence of it. You see, established opinion is so strong, that it controls even the bias of the mind. All the world will have it that the worker in Grub Street goes to his ruin. And so even I, who urge that this is now far from being the case, am disposed to think that the wise father will act wisely if he diverts his boy's brilliant gifts into any channel rather than the narrow straits of literature.

Granted, then, that the youth or maiden with a tendency towards literature be intelligent, stupendously industrious, able to concentrate, patient of what may seem to be slights and injuries the most cruel and unnecessary, and willing to endure all else that may befall him or her in the pursuit of literary success—granting this, there is a goal to be striven for and attained.

In the time of the Herons, and Dennises, and Harveys, it was otherwise. The one

or two geniuses of the age sat on a throne, and all the others knelt at their feet in abject adoration, or said behind their backs those bitter things, the utterance of which spleen and failure never fail to prompt in seasons of depression. Vain was it for these hapless ones to expend their lives in a too-zealous endeavour for recognition. They might work their fourteen hours a day, for weeks and months, without intermission, heaping up manuscript to no purpose. Sooner or later the body gave way, or the mind, or both ; they had but just time to repine about an ungrateful world, the miseries of authorship, and the stony hearts of the publishers, and then their troubles were over, and nothing remained of them, save the hard-wrought, imperfect book, which might or might not get printed, but would in nine cases out of ten remain unread.

It is in our breadth of scope, also, that we are far more blessed than these our luckless predecessors. In days when it was afeat of locomotion to travel to town, the mind of the average man was like to be as homely as his surroundings.

The master intellects could then, as ever, surmount time and space, and revel in the pure empyrean of Fancy, self-nurtured, and self-sustained. But the majority of those who were caught in the web of literary ambition, could only dig and delve among the writings of the ancients, and produce huge windy commentaries, terrible to contemplate. No divine creative breath ever had the chance to fertilise into activity what atoms of true original power lay sighing for expression in their tormented brains, and beneath a scholastic and antiquarian dust that day by day thickened within them. As the years fled on, life took inevitably the colour of their own wretchedness. The blue skies, the breezy mountain-tops, the sparkling streams, and the green fields, were nothing to them. They had never sacrificed to Nature. In their hours of need Nature had nothing of comfort to say to them.

On the other hand, consider how we are privileged. Not only do foreign lands—which have, indeed, become much less “foreign” than of yore—give us an inexhaustible material for literary wares, but they also offer us a tonic which is at least as valuable for mind as body.

What can be easier for the brain-sick scribbler than to take a ticket for Switzerland or Norway, and to go across the

water to recuperate ? New impressions make their mark upon him at once. But their very novelty is a refreshment. And so his medicine cures and nourishes him at the same time.

Formerly, the poor student, with the fever of fame in his veins, travelled one road and none other. He was the most helpless, the most ridiculous of mortals outside his Grub Street attic : a laughing-stock for street urchins, and a prey to all the rogues who were fortunate enough to know him in his brief hours of prosperity. Of the passions of life—save the one to which he had sacrificed all the others—he knew little or nothing by experience. He could write you a very correct love-ditty, in which Daphne and Phyllis trifled with each other's feelings in quite a statuesque manner. But he could no more declare his passion for a woman of flesh and blood like himself, than he could threaten to King's Bench a publisher who owed him a dozen crowns and preferred to keep him tarrying for the money.

His was the existence, in truth, of a shadow. He sat in Plato's cave with his back to the light, and saw mirrored on the wall before him the doings of other men. But the mischief of it was, that though he lived the life of a shadow, he had all the aspirations of those others whose bustling movements were ever before his eyes. He could have laughed as they laughed, and have loved like them, if only he had been content to live like them. As it was, however, this consciousness of latent ability and actual incapacity was but another ingredient in the cup of misery which he was compelled to quaff.

Vastly, indeed, are we, in this particular, superior to him. The novelist of our day is the very pulse of his contemporaries. He lives their life more deeply, and with a fuller consciousness, than they live it themselves. In no situation need he stand perplexed. He is passionate, pathetic, and humorous by turns, because he has, wittingly or not, strongly suffered, loved, and laughed in his journey through life. Love, especially, he has studied ; and he colours his stories with as many tints as there are diverse peoples on the globe. Each foreign land serves him as a new stage upon which to set his beloved puppets in action.

Moreover, if the typical inhabitant of Grub Street was among the most guileless and simple of men—so that the undiscerning might well take him for a fool—the modern writer, of the typical kind, may be

said to be so much an adept in experimental roguery and psychical wickedness, that it ought to be easier to outwit a police detective than him—the creator alike of detectives and tricks of sin which baffle the ingenuity of detectives.

Another thing. We, in our day, esteem the divine afflatus of inspiration of less consequence than did our friends of Grub Street. Ours is a rational age, and therefore, perhaps, rather an irreverent one. If, as might be argued, inspiration is a gift—mournfully spasmodic in its visitations—which seldom travels except attended, before or after, by empty stomachs, bodily languishing, patched clothes, and the spleen, we are well quit of it. Certain it is that they who prated most about the need of inspiration and the wonders they worked under its guidance, were only too often, in their latter days, a sad warning to others to shun inspiration as they would a plague-stricken person.

Listen to Dennis on the subject :

"Genius is caused by a furious joy and pride of soul on the conception of an extraordinary hint. Many men have their hints without their motions of fury and pride of soul, because they want fire enough to agitate their spirits; and these we call cold writers. Others, who have a great deal of fire, but have not excellent organs, feel the fore-mentioned motions, without the extraordinary hints; and these we call fustian writers."

You see, it was a great responsibility to claim to be inspired when Dennis was alive. He was so sure of his own inspiration, and so shrewd a critic, that he could not but have denounced you to your fellow-men—had you been so injudicious as to print and send him a copy of your book—as either a cold or a fustian writer. Spite of all, the poor fellow could not keep himself from wretchedness of the most pitiable kind. In his old age, when he was blind, he lived on the alms he received from the men whom he was so hot to prove were puny and contemptible writers.

I need hardly remark that "furious joy" of this uncomfortable kind is quite out of fashion now. If a discreet writer of mature judgment does, in a moment of "furious joy" and "pride of soul," chance to conceive an acceptable hint, he makes a note of it. But he allows the "furious joy" wholly to subside before he reviews the hint, and turns it over to see what it looks like. Even then he makes the examination in a very suspicious way. He

does not like the manner of the bantling's birth. To him it argues a weakness somewhere, and he is quite prepared to discover that it has a constitutional defect which will prevent it maturing.

No; let Dennis have his genius and spasmodic inspiration, so we are not deprived of the permanent faculties of industry and observation to which we look as our literary tools. Of course, it is not unpleasing to us to hear others talk of our "genius" and the "inspired" nature of our work; nor do we contradict or argue with them on their misuse of terms in such a case. But, none the less, it is a law of our literary code that "no man shall," with impunity, mention himself and the word "genius" in the same breath, or as synonymous expressions. "Genius" may indeed be said to be superseded by the mysterious alliteration "cobbler's wax." The most excellent works of imagination are begotten of nothing in the world else than "cobbler's wax" and a note-book.

But to revert to what I may call my text—the passage with which I have opened this paper. What Disraeli here says of authoresses may have been more or less true when he wrote it. Happily, in the year of grace 1889, it is infinitely less true. The privilege of signing herself "Authoress," a sorrow the most affecting to the female character! Forsooth, "sorrow" must now have quite another signification to what it had then, ere this be justified.

Our century has been—as we all know to the degree of tedium—a century of singular progress, change, or whatever you please to call it. But, to my mind, even the invention of steam-engines and electric-machines is not so remarkable a characteristic of it, as the alteration in their ideals and attitude towards life and mankind of women. This will surely go as far to revolutionise society, as steam and telegraph in their effect upon commerce and international politics. And in no particular is the revolution more strongly foreshadowed than in the prevailing multitude of women who, by means of their pens, disseminate the influence of their minds over all the civilised parts of the globe.

To us, of the other sex, this change may not be acceptable; nevertheless, we must accept and reckon with it.

To women themselves, however, it cannot but be very agreeable. They have long held the empire of the hearth. Let

us see, or rather let our children see, what is the outcome of their participation in, if not usurpation of, the control of the various other reins by which that mysterious biped, Mankind, is guided in the direction of order.

It may, I think, be assumed, that if the profession of authorship were as grievous a one for woman as Disraeli conceived it to be, it would be followed but scantly, be the pressure of existence ever so hard. The humble seamstress toils long hours daily for a pittance ; but at least she need have few mental anxieties. The writer, on the other hand, is daily hedged with trouble. Her mind is in travail at the same time that she is toiling with no assurance that her toil will meet with any reward.

And yet how stands the case ? In any published list of novels—to take the most typical branch of literature—what is the proportion of woman's work to man's ? Seldom less than as two to one, and often as much as five to one.

Nor can this fact be mitigated by the stock charge against our women novelists that they are incompetent, inartistic, and even pernicious, and that their success is explained by the imperfection of our nature, which enables us to appreciate what is mediocre rather than what is admirable.

There are iniquitous authoresses as there are iniquitous authors, whether their iniquity be of art or morals. But excellence abounds more than iniquity, and therefore merits the more notice.

Such names as George Eliot, Elizabeth Browning, Mrs. Gaskell, and—not, to slight the present decade—Mrs. Burnett and Edna Lyall, cover a multitude of inefficiencies in the rank and file of those of their own profession and sex. Are such women fit objects for the pity so gallantly tendered by Disraeli towards them and all like them ? I should rejoice to have their own individual replies to this question.

Perhaps it will be demurred further that such fame and recognition as these authoresses received does not atone for the toil itself. Well, in these days we give money-bags with our laurel wreaths to those whom the people delight to honour. If thousands of pounds sterling, in addition to the applause of tens of thousands of their fellow beings, cannot atone to the artist for the work of her ingenuity, then Art and her sister Literature are a pair of monstrous fetishes, instead of the benign abstractions they are supposed to be ; and it were well

to expel them for ever from the category of human influences.

The truth is, that what was good advice and reasonable sympathy in 1812, is obsolete, both as advice and sympathy, in 1889. Women have their field now as they had not then. Yearly, they are more at home in it. They know, quite as well as Disraeli knew, that the sorrows of ineffectual authorship are bitter to bear, whether for men or women. But, thanks to the changed times, they know more also. They are quick to perceive that nothing worth having is to be had without serious and even grievous effort ; and they thoroughly realise that here, the end, when reached, compensates for the pains and penalties endured in the quest of it.

A SIMNEL CHARM.

A COMPLETE STORY.

" DEBORAH, can you make a Simnel cake ? "

The old woman regarded her questioner with surprise.

" Mak' a Simnel, Miss Nina ? Ay, I reckon I'd be shamt o' mysen if I couldn'a ; an' a real owd Bury Simnel, too, boiled and baked, an' wi' saffron, an' maybe wi' a charm. But folk nowadays think theirs'n a sight too grand fur to need charms."

The two were standing in the kitchen of the Mill Farm, an old-fashioned kitchen with a stone floor, and whitewashed walls ornamented with shining pots and pans. The door was wide open, letting in a flood of sunshine. Through the doorway one caught a glimpse of the farmyard ; the river beyond, with the little foot-bridge ; and the mill, a cloud of spray rising from the water-wheel, that splashed and thundered, filling the air with a murmurous drone, above which one heard the chirping and twittering of birds. Across the river lay broad meadows, starred with celandines, and yet further, thick woods, the leafless trees standing out darkly against the blue.

" Charms, Deborah ? " repeated Nina, looking over the green fields with serious grey eyes, while a sunbeam entangled itself in the brown meshes of her hair, and turned it to gold. " What sort of charms ? "

" Love-charms, o' course. Eh, many's th' lass I've known put a charm in th' Simnel cake, if th' lad as hoo'd set her heart on woudna' speak. I mind puttin'

a charm i' a Simnel cake fur to mak' Matt Thompson oppen his mouth. I'd been walkin' out wi' him nigh on three year, an' I thowt it wur about toime to talk o' gettin' wed. So I made a couple o' Simmels, an' put th' charm i' th' smallest, an' set off whoam. I wur stayin' wi' an uncle then. It wur a Saturday afternoon, an' I met Matt at the first stile. 'I'm takin' mother a Simnel,' I says, 'and I've made another for thee. I'll give thee a bit now.' Wi' that, I broke a bit off. He took and ate it, an' says, 'Lass, tha's a graidly hond at Simmels. This here's a grand un. Let's ha' it fur a weddin' cake; it'll keep three week. We'll get parson to put up th' askin's to-morrow.' Ay, that wur a quick charm, sure enow."

"And what was the charm?"

"Tha takes a bit o' fern-root that has th' black mark in it—tha mun pull it at th' new moon—an' two white beans an' one black one—tha mun choose 'em at th' full moon—an' grind 'em all to powder, an' stir it into th' cake. When once th' charm is i' the cake, theer's nowt more to do but to moind as tha's th' first woman to give th' lad a slice on't. It dunnot matter who gives it to him afterwards—it's the first woman. Tha sees?"

"I understand."

"Ay, it's a good charm," repeated Deborah, pausing, with uplifted rolling-pin. "I dunnot know a better."

The inner door opened, and a pretty, dark-haired girl put her head into the kitchen.

"Deborah, you wicked old woman! Why didn't you tell me that charm? I might have used it. I've heard every word; it's a lovely charm!"

"Eh, Miss Molly, th' lad coom quick enow wi'out anything o' that sort," and a smile stole over the old woman's face.

"Would you like to make the experiment on anybody, Nina dear?"

Nina Croft blushed. It was a very faint, fleeting, wild-rose blush, but still it was there, and did not escape her friend's amused eyes.

"I could not make the Simnel," she said.

"Oh, yes, you could, under Deborah's superintendence. We will make one each, you and I, and Deborah shall make a third—a big one—for the household, as she always does. Our little Simmels," with a significant nod, "we will dispose of as we think fit. There is plenty of time to gather the charm materials. This week is new moon, and before mid-Lent Sunday there will be a full moon; so—"

"Wheer's th' cranberries fur th' tart?" enquired Deborah, looking up from her pastry.

"The cranberries? I forgot them." Molly disappeared, and returned with a large brown jar full of the bright red fruit.

"These are the last," she said, setting down the jar. "Nina, will you come out with me? Mother is in the Robin field, looking at the new Alderney Frank has given her. Come and choose it a name."

Mrs. Rushton had been left a widow, with an insufficient income and one daughter—Molly. Of course, relatives and unthinking friends had solved for her the problem of how to live by glibly observing that there was enough for herself, and Molly must teach. It is always so easy to assume that every girl has an inborn talent for teaching. But Molly declared she "could teach nothing, she was positive." She "hated the idea; besides, she knew nothing either. Also, she would not leave her mother." And as for Mrs. Rushton, no wonder the poor soul shrank from a lonely life in lodgings. At last, after much thought, mother and daughter decided upon taking the Mill Farm, and becoming "farmeresses," as Molly remarked. By letting most of the meadow-land they reduced the farm to manageable dimensions. Their little income paid the rent. They wisely did not attempt to grow cereals, but confined themselves to eggs and poultry, milk and butter, fruit and vegetables; things that found ready sale in the manufacturing town of Yale, four miles away. Wealthy people in the town, who had known Molly's father, made a point of purchasing direct from the Mill Farm. So the Rushtons led a busy and happy life in the fresh air and the smiling country; a life infinitely better for both than toil of teaching for the one, and weary solitude for the other.

"Of course," said Molly, to her school-friend Nina, "I cannot afford frocks to go to entertainments, so I never go anywhere. But old friends often come to see us, particularly in summer. We are not at all dull; and there is so much to do, that the days seem to fly."

This was Nina's first visit to the Mill Farm. Her stepmother had joyfully assented to her spending three months with Molly Rushton; for Mrs. Croft intended going abroad for that period, and had no great wish to take her stepdaughter with her. To the town-bred girl every-

thing was new and delightful ; and Molly had wonderful news for her when she arrived. Did Nina recollect Frank Hope ? He used to come to their house in Yale in the old days. He was a mill-owner. Surely Nina must remember him ; he was such a dear fellow, and so good-looking. Well, Nina must be her bridesmaid. They were to be married in the summer.

"And your mother ? Will she leave the farm ?" enquired Nina.

"Oh no ; she says she has grown fond of it, and it gives her occupation. I shall not be far away from her, for we shall live at Yale. I dare say she will have a cousin of mine to live with her when I am gone ; but nothing is settled yet."

Her future being so happily assured, Molly Rushton had no need of the Simnel charm. In truth, she thought no more about it. It lingered, however, in Nina's mind. Charms were mere silly superstition, she told herself. Nevertheless, when a silver crescent shone in the blue, somebody pulled up a root of the brown, withered bracken in the garden hedge. The fern grew by the little white gate through which Dr. Octavius Burnley had passed so often lately, in attendance on Mrs. Rushton, who had sprained her foot. The foot was well now ; and Molly and her mother rejoiced. So did Nina in sympathy ; yet she missed Dr. Burnley's visits. He had seemed to linger ; and once or twice had found time to stroll round the meadows with the two girls. He was a young man, and was in partnership with old Dr. Marsland, of Yale. So Molly said, adding that he was "a great friend of Frank's."

The crescent moon waxed, and the March sunshine brought out the blossom of the blackthorn, and strewed yellow celandines so thickly over the home meadow that, in spots near the river, the green was almost hidden by the gold. Here and there pinky white anemones ventured to open their fragile petals, while the palm-willows spread silvery white catkins, to tell the world that winter was over and Easter near. The foot-path through the fields led to an old-fashioned stile at the edge of the woods, and near it the first primroses always grew. One sunny afternoon, in the middle of the month, Nina discovered a great cluster of them, like a patch of brighter sunshine. She was stooping to pluck them, when Dr. Burnley's voice startled her.

"Have I frightened you ?" he said. "I

am so sorry. I suppose you were so absorbed with your primroses that you did not hear me coming ? I take this short cut twice a day now, unless it rains, when I drive round by the road, so don't mistake me for a poacher when you meet me in the woods."

"I don't go in the woods," replied Nina, "only about the meadows, when Molly is busy. I am never tired of admiring this place. It grows prettier every day."

From where they stood the fields stretched green and golden to the shining river ; the blackthorn was white in the hedges ; the red roof of the farmhouse stood out against the blue of the sky.

"Green, and gold, and white—those are the colours of early spring," said Burnley, looking, however, not around, but at his companion. "If you will come a little way with me, I will find you some more primroses. I saw them yesterday."

They turned down a path to the right, skirting the woods—a path partly overhung by larches, on whose swinging branches birds perched, and sang of the coming summer. Then the ground dipped, and in a grassy, ferny hollow were hundreds of the beautiful blossoms.

"They 'make a sunshine in the shady place,' like Una's hair, don't they ?" said Burnley. "Now you cannot possibly want all of them. Give me a few for myself. Have I not earned them ?" This when Nina was primrose-laden.

She gave him a small bunch, telling him that all the rest were needed to ornament the farm parlour.

"In honour of Simnel Sunday ?" he enquired. "Do you know Miss Rushton has invited me to come in after church with Hope, and eat Simnel according to custom ? As I shall do that at about twenty or thirty houses during the day, I expect to be very ill on Monday."

He walked back to the stile with her, and then said good-bye.

"I have not time to run in at the farm ; pray make my excuses. I must hurry off to the Hall. Old Mr. Fulshaw is ninety-two, and they expect me to cure him. I wish I could ; but I'm afraid nothing but the elixir of youth could do that, and I don't possess it."

He disappeared among the trees, and Nina returned to the farm, and astonished Molly with the primroses.

"How lovely ! How nice of Dr. Burnley to tell you where to find them ! Mother, do you hear ?"

"Yes, my dear. Poor Mr. Fulshaw! But really ninety-two is a great age. Deborah heard that they kept Dr. Burnley there till nearly eleven a few nights ago. I hope he does not take that short cut through the woods at night. I'm sure it is not safe with so many poachers about."

"Why, mother, poachers would not harm a doctor."

"Not intentionally, my dear; but they might mistake him for a keeper. Or, there might be shooting going on—a fight, I mean."

"Well, he would not take part in it," said Molly, laughing.

"Of course not; but one never knows whom those shots may hit. I confess I am dreadfully alarmed at poachers."

"Be comforted, mother; they won't 'burgle' the Mill Farm. And as for Dr. Burnley, he is quite safe, I am certain. Don't look so scared, Nina. I assure you if the man-in-the-moon had been a poacher, mother would picture him attacking the back-door with dog and sticks."

The man-in-the-moon! The moon was at the full that night, and all the evening Nina hesitated as to whether she should add the rest of the charm to that half-inch of fern-root that was lying in her dressing-case. Finally, when the household retired, she decided that of course she would not be so silly. Nevertheless, she sat up reading till the tall old clock downstairs droned eleven, and the moon was high above the farmhouse chimneys.

Nina drew aside the curtain and looked out. The night was very clear; the river, the meadows, the dark woods, were all bathed in the white glory of the moonlight. Half the farmyard was in the light, half in the dark shadows cast by the stables and barns, which were built at right angles with the house. Just below Nina's window, Turk, the mastiff, slumbered in his kennel beside the kitchen door. The dog knew her; she could pass him easily enough.

Mrs. Rushton and Molly slept at the front of the house; they would not be likely to hear her creep down these queer little back-stairs. And as for Deborah, certainly the old woman's room was near; but doubtless she would be tired, and would sleep soundly.

For Nina was half ashamed of her wish to try the charm. No one must know. Then she hesitated again; she would not get the beans. Yet, there was the granary, with its outside flight of wooden steps, just opposite Turk's kennel. How easy it would be to get a handful of beans out of the big

sack inside the door! Nina made up her mind, put on a warm jacket and little fur cap—for March nights are chilly, however mild the month may be—and stepped like a mouse down the stairs leading to the kitchen. The back-door was secured by an iron bar, and also by a primitive hook at the top, as well as by an ordinary lock and key. However, she contrived to undo all three fastenings with very slight noise.

Turk came out of his kennel, yawned, and slowly wagged his tail in recognition. Nina patted his head, ran across the moonlit yard, and up the granary steps. The door was locked; but the key always hung in the kitchen, and she had taken it as she passed through. In another minute she had a handful of the beans, and was selecting the magic three by the moonlight when a shot, followed by several more, broke the stillness of the night. Mrs. Rushton's words flashed into the girl's mind. Poachers! Yes, of course; and the gamekeepers had caught them. Surely there was no danger for—anybody else? It was not probable that he would stay so late at the Hall. Besides, they would not harm him. Nina stood by the granary door, straining her eyes across the two fields that separated the river from the woods. From the height of the steps she could see every yard of the way, from the footbridge to the stile—a low one with one bar. Over this a man stumbled, then fell in the short grass. She clasped her hands in horror, and the beans rolled with a faint rattle into the yard. She did not hear them—had forgotten them, in fact. Who was the man lying yonder? A wounded poacher, or keeper; or—Dr. Burnley? If a poacher, why did not his companions come to his assistance? Perhaps he was a solitary keeper? She must rouse the house and get help in any case; but for the moment she felt powerless to stir. Everything seemed so strangely unreal; the white night, the black, fantastic shadows, the soft lapping of the river, that prostrate figure lying in the moonlight. He raised himself, and crawled a few paces, then sank again. At that distance it was not possible to recognise him; but a terrible conviction came to Nina. Rushing down the steps, she unchained Turk; and bidding the dog follow her, ran over the little bridge, along the path, and found—as she instinctively knew she should—Octavius Burnley.

"An' a foine doment it wur," said old

Deborah to the miller one warm morning two months later. "When Miss Nina coom rushin' back an' rousin' us a' oop, eh ! yo' might ha' knocked me down wi' a hay-wisp, so to speak. An' me runnin' down to th' mill to wake ye a' oop fur to fetch th' doctor fro' th' field to th' house—I mun say yo' were pretty quick."

"Oh, ay," returned the miller, "I reckon we didna stop to curl our hair. I'm reet down glad them poachin' chaps wur caught. It's a foine thing to be lettin' fly at keepers, an' hittin' a mon walkin' quietly whoam. They hannot ought to ha' guns at a', but if they mun fire at keepers, let 'em hit 'em, I say, an' not go pepperin' folk as ha' nowt to do wi' th' roombus. It isna fair ! Eh dear, an' it wur owd Fulshaw's doin' in a way. He wur nobbut a poor moitherin' chap a' his loife, an' he couldna even dee wi'out makin' a bother. If he hadna kept Doctor Burnley that late, nowt would ha' happent. However, it's coom a' reet. He mun be gettin' well, as he's goin' whoam to Yale, to-morrow. 'Tis a long toime, though. Th' blackthorn wur white then, an' now th' apple-blossom is a' pink ivverywhere. But if a man mun be ill, th' Mill Farm isna a bad place, wi' a sweet-heart to help i' th' nussing." Deborah nodded.

"It wur that Simnel charm o' mine as saved him ; fur if Miss Niua hadna gone fur th' beans, th' doctor would ha' lain theer i' th' meadow an' deed. Ay, it wur a good charm!"

That was a year ago. The Mill Farm remains unaltered ; but some of its inmates are flown. Nina Croft has changed her name to Burnley, and lives at Yale, near her friend Molly, now Mrs. Hope, who laughingly maintains the undoubted efficacy of the Simnel charm.

"But we did not make the cakes," says Nina, "only Deborah made one. We forgot."

"Oh, that's nothing," retorts Molly. "Your intentions were to brew the charm."

Then, imitating Deborah, she adds, "Eh, but it wur a good charm!"

FRUIT UNDER THE HAMMER.

WHILE snow is gently falling, and roofs and piazzas are outlined in a thin white film, and a gleam of sunshine struggles through the wintry haze, giving here and there a glowing touch to the

scene below, Covent Garden, both new and old, is revealed to the passer-by. The old is outlined in the snow : the features of an earlier Covent Garden, not utterly changed, although constantly changing ; but that might still be recognised by remnants of a former age, if only by Wren's handsome barn of a church, and the general alignment of snow-clad roofs.

Here is the market as it existed and still exists to generations of patient gardeners, of market men and women, of flower-girls and orange-girls, of gallants, roysterers, and rakes, and those who hold midnight conversation with the streets ; of "Spectators" and "Observers," who have noted the aspects of the scene ; of frequenters of bagnios and coffee-houses, or the more modern haunts of the votaries of song and supper. But in the streaky gleams of such sunshine as a wintry March vouchsafes, a new Covent Garden presents itself, with widened approaches and vacant clearings and annexes here and there, as if the old market had taken a new lease of life, and had made up its mind to move with the times.

It wants but an hour to noon. The general business of the vegetable-market is well over, and the flower-market is emptied. A few carts are still lingering, and groups of casual porters and labourers stand huddled together in sheltered corners awaiting the chance of a job, which may open for them the portals of some snug bar or coffee-shop. There is a "débâcle" of empty baskets, a thaw of vegetable refuse ; sweepers are at work here and there ; while in contrast to the winter outside is the snug arcade, where spring is already blooming with the most vivid and delicate flowers, whose fragrance fills the air. And here are people buying bouquets and blooms for ball and banquets ; or funeral wreaths, perhaps, or flowers for a bridal.

But this is the time of day when the fruit-market begins to draw its frequenters together. Before now we may have assisted at the fruit sales that went on in the side aisles of Covent Garden, when apples and pears were to the fore, or cases of luscious grapes, or brilliant plums in hues of purple and gold, or boxes of tomatoes, or great bundles of bananas, or assortments of queer exotic products. But now the scene is changed. We are for the new hall of fruit, the latest development of Covent Garden—a hall that is not exactly new of itself, for it is the once so-called Floral Hall of Covent Garden Theatre,

which, in the palmy days of the Italian Opera, was intended to form an attractive and fashionable lounge for the frequenters of the Opera-house. It was to be a crush-room, where no crushing should be known, but where, among palms and graceful ferns, and in the midst of a paradise of flowers, the beauty and fashion of the period might wile away the intervals of opera or ballet, or await the coroneted carriage, that was entangled in the serried ranks of vehicles all up and down Bow Street and Long Acre. Here should the fashionable novelist place the scenes of his choicest love-passages. Here should Lady Ida and the Honourable Charles exchange impassioned vows, while the furred cloak of priceless sables was being placed upon the beautiful rounded shoulders, and while the amorous but elderly millionaire glared at them helplessly over the hedge of choice exotics. All this might have been; but, somehow, the Floral Hall failed in its rôle. Now and then a fête or fancy-fair might bring a momentary gleam of gaiety to its forlorn state, but for the greatest part of its existence as an annexe to the theatre, it was but a lumber-room for rubbish, a dock for decayed scenery. But now, as a part of Covent Garden Market, it has found useful and honourable employment. Like Tara's Hall, it has no more to say to chiefs and ladies gay—

So sleeps the pride of former days,
So glory's thrill is o'er!

The hall of fruit might be the temple of the winds, so searchingly does the cool north-easter traverse the avenues of boxes and cases, and whirl about the now empty pulpits of the auctioneers. But with the wide-open gateways giving on the market, and the lines of porters ascending and descending the stone steps, and moving in and out, with heavy cases on their backs, and a stolid confidence in their hearts that, in the event of running against anybody, that other party will get the worst of the collision—with all this ventilation, and movement of affairs, we can't expect the even temperature of a conservatory. There are a good many people already present, mostly well wrapped-up, and keeping themselves warm by lively movements, and by conversation of a genial and spicy character. The auctioneer, in fur coat and mufflers, exchanges smart repartees with his customers, and the glass roof, with its pale-green iron columns, resounds to strident cries, hootings, and laughter. "Come, come," says the attendant policeman, with

the air of an usher addressing a roomful of unruly schoolboys, "not so much noise, please, or you'll bring the Superintendent upon us."

But in the midst of all this clamour, there are quiet, silent people moving up and down, catalogue and note-book in hand, and scrutinising the various lots on sale with quickly appraising eyes; and getting into a sheltered corner below a pile of cases of oranges and lemons, the temperature seems suddenly to change. Instead of the north-easter, we have the balmy air of tropical seas; the snow-covered roofs are exchanged for waving palms, and rich, luxuriant vegetation, and the fragrance of a thousand luscious fruits fills the air. And this last sensation is by no means a delusion; for nearly the whole of the floor of this respectably-sized hall is occupied by pine-apples "just arrived per steam-ship 'Glenlivet.'" Here they lie in their narrow beds, packed in shavings, with compartments to themselves in the deal cases that hold a dozen or more, just as they were hauled out of the steamer's hold in the London Docks, while some of the vans that helped to bring them to the hall of fruit are waiting outside to carry them back to be shipped in some other direction after the sale. For in this matter of exotic fruits, both those who sell and those who buy belong to the cosmopolitan Israelitish persuasion; and Solomon of London is in accord with Levy of Paris, and Jacobs of Frankfort, and Isaacs of Hamburg, so that anything that may be bought cheap in one capital, may be sold to advantage in another.

To speak by the card, the thousand luscious fruits resolve, or rather expand, themselves into some two thousand five hundred pines. But the too tropical scenery must be modified. The greater part of the fruit here present comes from Saint Michael's—from those pleasant isles set in the midst of stormy seas, where all kinds of fruit grow freely in a kind of sub-tropical climate, free from all blights of frost or snow, but hardly hot enough to bring the pine-apple to perfection without the aid of glass above and heat below.

What a noble fruit is the pine-apple when seen in the fulness of its proportions as here, with its royal crown, its damascened armour! and what marvel of Nature's alchemy is its elaboration, in all its richness and glory, from such a commonplace stem and modest nimbus of sword-shaped leaves! Nor does it grow, like the

prophet's gourd, in a single night, but is the result of a couple of seasons' careful cultivation before the gorgeous fruit pushes forth on its stem. When the fruit is developed there is an end to the plant, which is propagated by offsets from the original root, or from the tufted crown of the fruit itself. Why the fruit should be called a pine-apple, is a yet unsolved enigma. But probably those bold buccaneers, and gay desperadoes, who formed their rendezvous about Campeachy Bay and Key West, and who left their buried treasures here and there on solitary islands for the benefit of the story-tellers and romancers, if of nobody else; these gentry probably had something to say in the matter.

For doubtless the West India Isles were the original habitat of the pine-apple, of which several varieties, but not of a toothsome kind, still grow wild in these regions. And our bold adventurers were, no doubt, struck by a certain outward resemblance between these fruits and the resinous cones that were familiar to them as the product of the tempest-tossed pine-trees of the hills and forests of their native shores. The specific name of the eatable pine is strictly the anana; but let one enter a fruiterer's shop and demand an anana, and the chances are that he would be driven to humiliating explanation before he could obtain his desire. And, indeed, in the earliest mention of its arrival on English shores the fruit is in possession of its English name. In 1661, Evelyn writes: "I first saw the famous Queen Pine brought from the Barbadoes and presented to His Majestie; but the first that were seen in England were those sent to Cromwell four years since."

Always more or less of a Royal fruit has been the lordly pine-apple till these modern days, when it may be found often enough upon the costermonger's barrow, or retailed to children at a penny a slice; while preserved pines in tins from Singapore, and elsewhere, are of excellent flavour and bouquet, and are sold over grocers' counters at sevenpence or eightpence a-piece. But the English hot-house pine is still a dish to set before a King, and no other nation can rival our skilled gardeners in raising the fruit, although it is said that the Dutchmen first taught us the way to grow them, and that Bentinck, ancestor of the Dukes of Portland, was the first to introduce their cultivation into this country. Memorable among pine-apples was one

grown by the Thane of Cawdor, in Pembrokeshire, which weighed ten and a half pounds, and was presented to George the Fourth in 1821, for his Coronation banquet. George's French contemporary, Louis the Eighteenth, was notable for his love of pine-apples, a taste which he acquired, perhaps, during his exile in England.

But meditations on pine-apples in general are rudely interrupted by a vigorous fusilade of raps upon the desk of one of the pulpits devoted to the auctioneers. There is a general movement that way among the scattered groups of buyers. "Sale on! sale on!" is shouted, while the resounding accompaniment of the auctioneer's hammer echoes through the building. No time is wasted in preliminaries. The cases of fruit are vigorously handled by porters, and hoisted over the heads of the audience, to a platform, which stands in the same relation to the rostrum of the auctioneer as did the desk of the old-fashioned clerk to the pulpit of the old-fashioned parson.

But vigorous and sonorous as may be the voice of the salesman, he does not trust to his unaided efforts. Three or four assistants crowd about him: one to note, others to watch the biddings, and all to join in the quick, sonorous announcement of the latest bid.

"Two; two n'al'; three!" shouts the auctioneer, snapping the bids by a sort of intuitive process from nods, or winks, or upheld fingers. "Three, three, three," echo the full-voiced choir, with the rapidity of the three cheers of the Kentish fire. "Bang" goes the hammer. Somebody cries "Short," and away goes another lot. As for auctioneer's blarney, there is none; no dwelling upon the beauty and excellence of the fruit. Sometimes, when a lot of especial size and fineness appears over the heads of the audience, there will be a yell of appreciation from the desk:

"Now look at these!" in thundering unison from half-a-dozen voices. "Five, six, seven!" cries the auctioneer in a kind of frenzy, and the antistrope—if that is the right word—succeeds with a still more furious and united roar of "Seven!" Bang goes the hammer again.

"Brown," cries another voice.

"Look at these!" thunders out the choir. "Bang, bang!" The hammer is wielded so quickly and with such force that the head tumbles off; but the brave owner works away with the stump.

One thing may be noted here, as in all other public auctions. There is always the

discontented man present, the one who "bears" everything, as if by inherited instinct; who starts the bidding, if he can, at a price contemptuously low, and tries to throw cold water on any enthusiasm that may be manifested by the assistants. "Do to bale for tatars," he exclaims, as a lot of the smaller specimens of the consignment appear. But his remarks are received without bitterness, and he seems to be recognised as fulfilling a definite office in the business, like that of the "devil's advocate," who is said to appear whenever there is question of a canonisation at Rome. But the general run of buyers and dealers are rather of a cheerful and even jovial cast; they delight in sitting with legs dangling on piles of boxes, and in hurling their winged words into the ring of people below. They recognise each other by names which are not of either Christian or Jewish terminology. And there is a brisk confidence and decision in their business offers, which are prime requisites in the full gallop of a Covent Garden auction.

As the interest in the present sale slackens, a renewed hammering, and knocking, and jumble of voices is heard from another quarter, and, like the crowd at a fair, people move off "en masse" to the newer attraction. This is a sale by catalogue, the lots being exhibited all over the floor, and long, green catalogues freely distributed. And here the play of emotion on the part of buyers and sellers is less distinctly marked; but the sale proceeds at a still more rattling pace, and with quite as loud and strident vocal accompaniment. So trying is the strain upon the vocal organs, while the stiff nor'-easter is whistling through every crack and crevice, that the first performer turns hoarse, and shelters the said organs behind a stout muffler, while his "under-study" takes up the strain where he left off; although still, from behind his shawl, the indomitable man joins hoarsely in the general chorus at critical moments in the bidding.

There is art in all this business, no doubt; although, to the casual observer, it appears only a matter of lungs. But the great masters of the profession are also the most chary of words; and a country auctioneer will display as much eloquence over an old woman's kettle as would serve to dispose of a whole stud of horses at Tattersall's, or a complete gallery of pictures at Christie's. And in fifty minutes or so from now, the whole two thousand odd pine-

apples, ex "Glenlivet," will be knocked down and disposed of, which have taken years to grow, have exercised the minds of shippers and consignees, while the result of the pregnant hour may bring joy or sorrow, contentment or hard times to households far away over the tempest-tossed seas.

To-morrow to fresh woods and pastures new.

To-morrow we shall have oranges and lemons—a shipload or two—with onions from distant realms, and Newtown pippins of more familiar brand. Or are you for Bread-fruit from Otaheite, or Mangosteen or Pomelow from further India, or any other fruit of rare and peculiar virtue? You have only to bide your time, and come upon the right day, and surely you may light upon what you want, in some corner or other of Covent Garden.

CONFESIONS OF A CARETAKER.

A SERIAL STORY.

By "RITA."

*Author of "Dame Durden," "Darby and Joan,"
"My Lord Conduit," etc.*

CHAPTER XXII. DANGER!

FOR some time after that night Miss Kate did not mention Mr. Tresyllion's name to me when I officiated as lady's maid, or when she spoke of the various entertainments at which she was present. I watched her carefully—almost jealously. I noted a certain feverish restlessness about her; a craving for excitement; a fitful, unreal gaiety that told me of a mind but ill at ease.

However, I said nothing. I thought it best.

One morning she came into my room rather hurriedly. "Jane," she said, "I have just had a telegram from Mr. Caruthers. He says, he is going to bring an old friend to luncheon. Look at the name."

She handed me the paper and I glanced at it. This was the message: "Am bringing an old friend, Tresyllion, to luncheon, two p.m."

We looked at each other silently. Her face was cold and very pale. "Is it fate, do you think?" she said ironically. "What is the use of my avoidance or coldness?"

"I think," I said, "that he ought not to have accepted—ought not to come."

"Ought not to come!" she repeated, scoffingly. "Does a man ever resist the temptation that pleases him? You

see he is determined to force me into meeting him. And—and Reggie is not here now."

"No," I answered. "What a pity. I wish he were. But, Miss Kate," I added, suddenly, "you could make an excuse. You need not come down to luncheon; it is easy to say you are not well."

"And so appear afraid to meet him," she said, her lip curling scornfully. "No, Jane. I won't give him the satisfaction of thinking that. I will face it as—as I have faced other meetings."

"You have seen him, sometimes, then?" I asked her, wondering a little how the pretty face could look so cold and proud, and the curved, red lips take such hard, stern lines.

"Seen him! Oh! yes. Spoken to him, taken his arm, gone down to dinner once with him; but this will be more difficult, Jane."

"Why, Miss Kate?"

"Oh," she said, impatiently, "don't you know? Can't you see that one can't treat a guest at one's own table, as one treats an acquaintance at another person's?"

She paused, then said suddenly, with one of those rapid changes of mood that always made me wonder whether she would ever take anything very seriously:

"I know what I will do, Jane. I will put on my most unbecoming gown, and I will do my hair that way he used to hate—straight on my forehead; you know. When he sees me looking ugly, as well as indifferent, surely, surely he will give up trying to make me think of him—talk to him as—as in the old days."

I laughed. I could not help it.

"Oh, my dear Miss Kate," I said "don't you know yourself better than to think gowns or hair-dressing could possibly make any difference to the opinion of any one who knew you? You cannot help your charm any more than you can help your prettiness."

"Indeed! Indeed, Jane!" she said, seriously. "You make a great mistake. I am not pretty; I never was. I have gone through life, of course endeavouring to make people believe so; but it is really only a question of colour and arrangement. That's why I'm so particular about my gowns, and my—well, my surroundings. Don't you know some one once said that a clever woman always contrives situations, if she wishes to make a picture of herself in the mind of a man? Well, I don't know that I am particularly clever; but I have

always contrived to leave picturesque memories of myself scattered about, and they served quite as well as a reputation for actual beauty. It is quite usual for people—chiefly men, I allow—to say to me, 'The night you wore that yellow gown, or that pink gown, and stood against such and such a background'—or, 'The night you were leaning against those terracotta cushions on the big lounge, in Mrs. So-and-So's room;' or, 'When you stood in that conservatory, with the palms and azaleas behind you;' or something to that effect. You see, my charm consists in getting them to see me, not as I am really, but as part of a picture that is framed in their memory, associated with some touch of colour, music, romance. But in its way it is quite as artificial as the limelight to stage-beauty, or the rouge and antimony to the fading charms of sixty. People think I am pretty or charming, while really it is a mere matter of the blue, or pink, or yellow that formed my toilette, the backgrounds I chose so artfully, or the audacity of my words and manners which made an impression; when a more beautiful, or clever, but less specious person has failed to do so."

I shook my head.

"You may say what you please, Miss Kate," I answered; "but I've known you too long not to know that there's something about you better than looks, or colours, or 'arrangements,' as you call them. Something difficult to forget. I am hardly likely to flatter you, my dear," I added sadly; "but I must say I feel sorry for any man who has once learned to care for you. There are hundreds of women prettier, no doubt; cleverer, perhaps; but there is just something about you—I can't say what—that would always make you stand out alone, so that one would always remember you as having said something, or done something, or looked something different to what any of the other women had said, or done, or looked; something that made it difficult to forget you even if one wanted to, I think."

"Oh," she said, with that odd little smile just shadowing her lips. "That is only just my artfulness, Jane, as I have been trying to impress upon you. It is so easy, so painfully easy, to leave that sort of impression, if women only knew. But as a rule they are too vain, or too stupid, or too indifferent, and that is why they fail. So you see, if I look unbecoming, and am

very stupid and uninteresting, I may yet succeed in disenchanting my undesired and undesirable admirer."

"Perhaps," I suggested with some diffidence, "perhaps, Miss Kate, if you told your husband—"

"Told John!" she burst out stormily. "How could I! That is nonsense, Jane! What is there to tell—shadows, suspicions, fears, that may end in nothing? Oh, no, no. I could not humiliate myself to him by putting into words what—what I can scarcely allow myself to think."

"Then," I said quietly, "nothing remains to be done but accept his visits again; for you may be quite sure, Miss Kate, he won't rest content with only coming here once—more especially if Mr. Carruthers brings him."

She looked at me with something so sad and despairing in the brown eyes, that I felt my own grow dim for a moment.

"I wish," she said, suddenly, "oh, Jane, I wish I could tear myself out of myself! Can you understand what I mean, what I feel? No, I suppose not. And I can't explain. It is horrible, horrible, horrible! Something I don't want to be—that I hate to think I am—warring, and fighting, and setting itself against me, upsetting my life and making it all different. I should like to be good, gentle, prosaic, quiet. An amiable woman—that just expresses it—thoroughly content with her life from day to day; desiring nothing and anticipating nothing beyond. But instead of that, what am I?—discontented, passionate, impulsive; a fiend, a fury, a—"

"Oh no, no, Miss Kate," I interrupted, "not that. Don't say such hard things, or make yourself out something quite different to what you really are!"

"What I—really—am," she said, slowly. "Ah, Jane, that is what no one who knows me, knows. I think there are possibilities within me that I myself am afraid to look into too closely. How shocked you look;" and she laughed a little, but not mirthfully. "Oh, Jane! what a comfort it must be to be good, calm, feminine, prosaic; never to question, never to worry, never to think."

She turned away then, and went to the door. I stepped forward to open it, and as she left, she turned her head and smiled at me.

"I am going," she said, "to make myself just as ugly as I can!" and with the echo of her light laughter still in my ears, I returned to my own duties.

I cannot say how that luncheon passed off, or whether Miss Kate kept her resolution. I saw her no more that day, and the next morning she was quite cool, and calm, and indifferent, giving me my orders, but no confidences; and I, of course, asked no questions.

Miss Kate had a little, dignified, stand-off way with her sometimes, that repressed any outward expression on my part of what our relative positions had so long accustomed me to feel concerning her.

I always felt I must keep my place, and wait for her to make the advance, despite the familiarity and friendliness which had so often broken down the hard and fast barriers between mistress and servant.

But a week passed, and another, and yet another, from the date of that luncheon, and still she never mentioned the name that, I am sure, was in both our thoughts so often. I did not like the new, strange, hunted look that at times came into her eyes—a look as of some wild forest creature being gradually driven into a trap from which it saw no escape.

She seemed to live in a whirl of gaiety, and was scarcely ever at home. One morning, when she looked utterly fagged and worn-out, I ventured on a remonstrance. She only looked at me and smiled that odd, hard, little smile, which of late had taken the place of her childish gaiety and merriment.

"Wear myself out, Jane," she said, repeating my words. "I wish I could. I wish I could be sure it was even possible. I would go on as I am going every day of the year—every day—I mean it, Jane—if only I knew it would kill thought, and wear me out, as you call it."

"That sounds foolish, Miss Kate," I said, gravely. "You ought not to be so ungrateful for all the blessings of life."

"I suppose," she said, "it does sound foolish; but it is only—desperate."

A smile crept slowly to her lips and eyes—a little, cruel, mirthless smile, unlike anything I had ever seen on that bright, sweet face.

"I am afraid, Jane," she said, "I did not make myself ugly enough. It was no use. And now things are almost at a crisis."

"Oh, Miss Kate," I cried, terrified by the despair in her face, "don't talk like that—don't tell me there is anything worse—"

She threw herself down into the big

arm-chair, and for a moment or two buried her face in her hands as if rent by some inward struggle.

"Oh!" she cried at last. "I must speak—I must; I can't keep silence any longer. My heart is breaking, I think. I feel as if I can't bear this strain—I can't! Life is getting too hard for me, Jane. I am not used to playing the hypocrite always; but that is what I have to do—I have to act, act, act, till I am sick of acting, to act to the world—to my husband—to myself—to him!"

She caught her breath with a little, sudden sob, but then hurried on, as if the impetuous flow of words were some relief.

"Oh, life is cruel, horrible, hateful," she cried. "I never wished to see him. I never wished to win his love. Yes, it has come to that, Jane. He does love me, and I know it. I can't deceive myself any longer. And, when I thought I was so safe, so happy, so content, fate throws him in my path; and I can't be always cold, always indifferent, because—because—"

"Oh, Miss Kate," I said in horror. "Not because you care—too—much?"

"Care?" she said, and her hands dropped, and she looked at me in straight and simple fashion, as if she were a child again. "No, Jane, I don't—care. That does not half express it, only all that makes life for me, all that promises happiness, all that is worth the daily existence I call living, is centred in and associated with—Rex Tresyllion. Go where I may, he haunts me. Look where I will, I see only his eyes—his face. It seems as if I can't get away from him; can't for even one moment, forget him."

"It has come to that?" I questioned, sadly.

"Yes," she said, "he has told me, and I have listened."

"Does he know," I asked, "that you care too?"

"I think," she said, "he does. I—I tried my best to hide it. Up to a certain point I succeeded. But there comes a weak moment in every woman's life, and mine came and found me off guard for once. I am afraid"—and she sighed wearily—"I am afraid, Jane, my armour will never serve me again."

"What will you do?" I asked her.

"Heaven knows," she said. "In books of course, people are heroic, and part; but I am not heroic, Jane. No more is he. It seems so hard to put all the colour,

and sunshine, and light, out of one's life just from an abstract, chilling idea of duty."

"No doubt," I said. "But oh, Miss Kate, if one understands a duty, ought not one to carry it out? The harder a thing is to do, the more certain we may be that it is right to do it."

"You are quite a philosopher, Jane," she said, drearily; "but if you had ever loved and been tempted as some women are, I think you would have found it rather a hard task to act as you preach. No one, man or woman, can possibly fathom the depth and strength of a temptation that has never touched them individually."

"But is it really temptation?" I asked. "Are you sure, Miss Kate, that you are not fancying things—romancing a little—because he is young, and good-looking, and celebrated? They are not things to make up one's life, after all. Indeed, I think no woman would marry a good-looking man if she were wise. They are so conceited as a rule, and they never rest satisfied with only one worshipper, and, unfortunately, it is only too easy for them to find a score if they wish."

"I have often thought that," she said, slowly. "I who once imagined that nothing on earth could ever make me jealous. Yes, Jane, I am afraid it is temptation. Something—I don't know what—is drawing me slowly, surely to him, in spite of sense, reason, honour, duty—everything that claims my life and warns me to avoid him. What am I to do? Oh, Heaven! what am I to do?"

She wrung her hands in a helpless sort of way, and looked at me with great tears brimming in her eyes.

"I haven't told you all," she said, in a stifled, hurried voice. "If ever you have prayed for me, Jane, pray for me now. John is going away—abroad. He told me so, yesterday. Some relation in the West Indies has died suddenly, and left him a great estate there. But there are legal difficulties and complications, and he must go out and see to them himself. He leaves in a week's time."

"Could you not go with him?" I asked, eagerly.

"I asked him," she said; "but he refused to take me. He said it would be useless, and the climate is bad—the place is not the healthiest in the world. It was all so sudden, so unexpected, that I can scarcely believe it, sometimes."

"And what are you to do?" I asked.

"Stay on in town alone, or go to Templecombe?"

"Either, or both," she said. "He lays no commands on me. I may see the season out, or cut myself adrift from its allurements, just as the whim takes me."

"Does Mr. Tresyllion know?" I asked, quickly.

The colour left her face. She grew very white.

"No," she said, "not yet. But, doubtless, John will tell him."

"I think, my dear," I said, quietly, "you ought to go to Templecombe, and you ought to have your children with you. Don't stay in town after your husband leaves. What is the use of courting danger, of meeting temptation half way?"

"Such a wise old Jane," she said, mockingly. "Such a far-seeing, clear-headed, sensible old person! That is just what I am going to do. My power over myself is not quite gone. I—I can still see what is best and safest for me." Then, suddenly, her face changed. There was anguish in her eyes, as they turned in swift entreaty to my own. "Oh, Jane! surely it can't last!" she cried. "This pain, this fever, this unrest. Surely, absence and silence will kill it out; surely I shall find rest somewhere—somehow. I don't want to be happy," she added, piteously; "I only ask to have a little peace once more. To know some content and quiet in my life. Now it is all torture and misery, look at it as I may. I can't sleep at night—I can't rest by day. My mind is always strained and racked. Often and often I look at myself in wonder. I can't understand why such a thing should have happened to me. All my life has been so free, so careless. I never thought it was in me to take a serious fancy to—to any one. But, perhaps it won't last, Jane. It is just a sort of illness, like measles or scarlet-fever, or something of that sort. It will run its course and be over. What am I saying? Why it—must—be over. There can be no other way. I tell myself that always."

"Yes," I said, sadly. "If it only rested with the telling—"

"You mean," she said, sharply, "that it might last? That I shall not forget? Oh, Jane! don't you know me better than

that? I am not a bit true, or faithful of heart, not a bit; and this—why, it is degrading, shameful, humiliating even to think of. I must get over it. There is nothing else to be done. Only it seems a little harder than I once thought it would."

"It will be very much harder than you fancy," I said, "if you don't put an end to it at once. The longer you delay—the more you think—the worse it will be."

"You talk," she said, fiercely, "as if one could help thinking! Do you suppose I want to? Do you suppose it makes me any happier? Heavens—no! But I didn't make myself, or my nature, and I have to put up with it, and bear it."

She dropped her hands and leant back wearily in the chair. Now that her eyes were free from tears, her face looked even more pathetic in its quiet despair.

"Jane, say 'Heaven help you and save you,'" she said, entreatingly. "I can't pray for myself any longer. There seems to be something between me and the old, simple faith. I have no mother to go to—no friend to whom I could speak as I have spoken to you, and the struggle is wearing me, and making me old, and sad, and haggard. Oh! if I only could sleep and forget for the next six months. You don't know how I dread them, Jane."

She rose and moved restlessly away to the door.

"If I could die—now!" she said, in a low, despairing voice that hardly reached me. "I am afraid of myself. I seem to have lost all strength. I am like a leaf blown here and there by every gust of wind. There is a very strong wind hurrying the leaf along, now. I suppose, if I believed in Fate, I would call it that. It is as good a name as any other."

The door closed. She was gone. I sat there for long—full of sorrow and of pity for the story I had heard, full of dread for its possible sequel. Was it Fate? I asked myself. Could there be a love at once cruel, compelling, relentless, that made of human lives a sport and plaything? And I only heard as answer the tones of that sad, young voice echoing in my ears—"I will call it that. It is as good a name as any other."

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